

LICHEN

A SHORT FILM BY LISA JACKSON



"Jackson's remarkable *Lichen* consisted of close-up footage of the composite organisms... the tiniest objects of inquiry here became the most cosmic and otherworldly."

- Canadian Art Magazine

CONTACT

CYDNEY LANGILL

Associate Producer

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LICHEN FILM STILLS AND DIRECTOR HEADSHOT

[Drive Folder](#)

TRAILER

<https://vimeo.com/386343002>

RUNTIME	11 mins: 37 sec: 14 frames
ASPECT RATIO	1.43
FORMATS	3D and 2D: IMAX, 4K AND 2K DCP, ProRes QT
CAMERA	Sony F65 with macro lenses
SOUND	5.1 and Stereo

“Minimalist in technique, maximalist in impact, it carried me to a sense of deep wonder, of attentiveness to the unspeakable beauty of the living world.”

- Trevor Goward, Lichenologist

SYNOPSIS

This stunning otherworldly short film takes a deep dive into lichen, a species that confounds scientists to this day. Shot in macro 3D, *Lichen* offers us a look at this remarkable life form and asks what we might learn from it. Ancient and diverse, both an individual and a community, lichens can live in the most extreme environments, including outer space. This meditative film bridges science and philosophy, and the words of lichenologist Trevor Goward illuminate the terrain in poetic and thought-provoking ways.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

These days we hear a lot about bubbles. Everyone is receding into their chosen communities and society seems to be devolving into a myriad of inward-facing groups. We're losing our connections to those who differ from us, to civic engagement, to nature, to common courtesy, as screen-time expands to fill our days and nights. Social media's algorithms are tuned to stoke our basest instincts and we're tired of fear, anger and factionalism. We're isolated.

As a filmmaker known for crossing genres and forms and not ever staying in my lane, I'm driven these days to cross-pollinate, engage varied perspectives, ignite dialogue between groups. My inspiration ranges from art galleries to television series to *Scientific American* (which sparked this film). I almost went into law, I'm a linguistics nerd. I believe that today's hyper-specialization isolates us and that in reaching across divides there is much to be gained.

While I don't fit tidily into categories, which can be challenging, I see myself as a translator across boundaries. Not just between people but also looking at what we can learn from the living world around us, as Indigenous folks have always done (I'm Anishinaabe on my mother's side). The term "all our relations" captures that sense of our connectedness to all of life and indeed, for me, discovering the profound affinity lichenologist Trevor Goward has developed with lichen opened my eyes to the wisdom to be found in this remarkable and stunning life form.

And I love that lichen defies scientists, who still don't know whether it's an individual organism or a close relationship between a fungus and an algae, a mini-ecosystem. Did you know the word symbiosis was coined to describe lichen? That it can survive in the most inhospitable places on the planet and even survive months in outer space, but it can't be kept in captivity? That it can break down stone into soil? That it grows on rocks, trees, earth, and even on air itself? It reminds us of the long curve of time and what it means to be resilient.

In these challenging times I think that there is an important role and responsibility of artists, or at least for me, to inspire and illuminate paths to novel ways of thinking and to harness beauty and wonder to the task. That is the goal of *Lichen*—to move us, bring us to a liminal place where possibility feels real and the world is re-invested with richness and complexity. From this place, in some small way I hope to instill a desire to dig deeply into nature, to let it hold us, to learn from it, and to protect this remarkable planet, which—like the otherworldly lichens in this film—floats in a dark universe, bursting with life whose origin and magic is beyond our understanding.

INSPIRATION

Lichen was inspired by a feature article in *Scientific American* by Erica Gies, "The Meaning of Lichen: How a self-taught naturalist unearthed hidden symbioses in the wilds of British Columbia —and helped to overturn 150 years of accepted scientific wisdom."

Read article here:

<http://ericagies.com/write/the-meaning-of-lichen-scientific-american/>

“Diving deep into lichens, Lisa Jackson’s film invites us to focus close attention on these symbiotic beings. Seeing lichens anew yields illumination onto our wider world: that systems are the primary agent of biology, that organisms, systems, and Earth itself have agency.”

-Erica Gies, Independent writer, National Geographic Explorer

FESTIVALS

- Images Film Festival, Toronto April 18, 2019
Closing Night at Cinesphere IMAX theatre, as part of the program “Outer Worlds”
- Sundance Film Festival, January 2020

CURATOR STATEMENT

Reuniting cinematographer Bob Aschmann and award-winning Anishinaabe filmmaker Lisa Jackson for their fifth project (*Savage* (2009), *Intemperance* (2014), *Transmissions* (2019), *1491: The Untold Story of the Americas Before Columbus* (2017)) , *Lichen* reveals worlds within worlds that exist beyond the human senses on our planet. Though if you learn how to observe them, you will find lichens everywhere – they come in different shapes and sizes, and grow on surfaces (natural and constructed) all across the planet. Using powerful 3D macro lenses to photograph their “emergence,” Jackson's film takes us on a meditative journey into a plethora of surreal planetary ecologies. Unlike early anthropocentric views of miniature domains, *Lichen* features many strange and exquisite species, each one the result of unique pairings between fungus and algae (or cyanobacterium). Lichen are never single organisms but are generated by interactions, networks, relationships with places in deep time.

Jackson interviews renowned lichenologist Trevor Goward to understand the philosophical implications of these complex organisms that predate human existence. At times sounding like French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, Goward explains what we may learn from these beings which are always in a state of “becoming.” *Lichen* reflects upon their mysterious and silent symbioses as a process of cooperating multiplicities that stand in contrast to the turbulent geopolitics of the 21st century. This characteristic may be the key to their longevity. This film is part of a commissioned IMAX program called “Outer Worlds” supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, New Chapter Program 2019.

PRESS

“Two of the most impressive contributions—Lisa Jackson’s *Lichen* (2019) and Oliver Husain’s *Garden of the Legend of the Golden Snail* (2019)—further situate their work in the context of earlier films through their use of voice-over and 3D images.

Seemingly in response to the questions of scale that surrounded and informed the project, Jackson’s remarkable *Lichen* consisted of close-up footage of the composite organisms, accompanied at first by the fluttery compositions of Japanese ambient composer Hiroshi Yoshimura before being supplemented by the voice of self-taught lichen specialist Trevor Goward. Shot in a darkened studio where the specimens were accented by impressionistic movements that produced the effect of passing planets, the tiniest objects of inquiry here became the most cosmic and otherworldly."

- **Canadian Art Magazine**

Scientific American Blog

“What Lichens Can Teach Us: A New IMAX Film Highlights Their Beauty and Resilience”

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/what-lichens-can-teach-us/>

TREVOR GOWARD, LICHENOLOGIST

I am a life-long with a naturalist’s passion for discerning patterns in nature – and for integrating those patterns into ecological narratives (hypotheses) of increasing complexity and reach. My birth certificate says I was born in Vancouver British Columbia in 1952, but I like to think I entered this world ten years later when a move to B.C.’s dry interior started me exploring the grasslands and pine-scented forests around Kamloops. It was there that I learned to recognize and (because I had no field guides) give names to scores of dryland plants and animals – in this sense “discovering” them to myself. Much later, during my university years, I worked as a seasonal interpreter in B.C.’s parks; and here too I took enormous pleasure in learning about wild places and the organisms that inhabit them. My interest in lichens dates from 1976 when as an undergraduate student in French and Latin (at Mt. Allison University, N.B.), I began to sit in on 3rd and 4th year biology classes. Eventually I decided to make lichens a personal focal point; and in the late 70s and early 80s I made several study trips to the National Herbarium in Ottawa, the UBC herbarium in Vancouver, and abroad. In 1984 I purchased the deed to 4 ha of “unimproved” land in B.C.’s Clearwater Valley, where I later built a home, Edgewood Blue, and a lifestyle, which I call designer living. For more than two decades I have supported myself mostly on “lichen dollars”, working as a consultant with a special interest in lichen ecology and taxonomy.

<https://www.waysofenlichenment.net/trevor/bio>

CREATIVE BIOS

LISA JACKSON, DIRECTOR

With a background in documentary, Lisa Jackson expanded into fiction with *SAVAGE*, which won a Genie award for Best Short Film. She is known for her cross-genre projects including VR, animation, performance art film and a musical. *Playback Magazine* named her one of 10 to Watch and her work has played at festivals internationally, including Berlinale, Hot Docs, SXSW, Tribeca, and London BFI, as well as airing on many networks in Canada.

Her NFB VR work *BIIDAABAN: FIRST LIGHT* premiered at Tribeca Storyscapes, has exhibited widely around the world, won a Canadian Screen Award, was nominated for a Webby, and has garnered high praise from press and the public. *TRANSMISSIONS*, a 6000-square-foot multimedia installation on the power of language, premiered in September 2019 at SFU's Milton Wong Theatre. *UNEARTHED*, a film component from the installation, was featured at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) for Nuit Blanche. Her recent short film *LICHEN* is part of *Outer Worlds*, an IMAX commission project featuring the work of five artists including Michael Snow. In 2017 she co-directed the CBC Firsthand one-hour doc *INDICTMENT: THE CRIMES OF SHELLY CHARTIER* which won Best Doc at imagineNATIVE. She's currently developing series and one-off television and film work in both fiction and documentary, as well as an installation media project in collaboration with incarcerated women.

In 2016, she directed the 360-degree film *HIGHWAY OF TEARS* for CBC Radio's *The Current* and in 2015 she field directed 21 drama segments for the 8-part APTN/ZDF docudrama series *1491: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE AMERICAS BEFORE COLUMBUS*, based on the best-selling book by Charles C. Mann, which was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award.

She was Director of the Gladue Video Project with Osgoode Hall Law School, programming consultant for Hotdocs, sits on the NFB's Indigenous Advisory Committee, and has been the Director Mentor for the National Screen Institute's IndigiDocs Program. She is Anishinaabe from the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, has a BFA in Film Production from SFU, an MFA from York University, and is an alumna of the Canadian Film Centre's Directors Lab, TIFF Talent Lab, and IDFA Doc Summer School. She is a popular public speaker and media commentator, and has been featured on CBC Radio's *The Current*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Now Magazine*, *The Georgia Straight* and others.

lisajackson.ca

TERRA LONG, EDITOR AND SOUND DESIGNER

Terra Jean Long is a filmmaker and editor of award winning shorts and features. She creates tapestry like works that draw on personal narrative, histories, landscape and the interstitial space between the real and the imaginary. Her films have screened at film festivals including TIFF, IFFR, CPH: DOX, IDFA, and the Edinburgh International Film Festival among others. She holds a BFA from Concordia University and an MFA from York University in film production.

BOB ASCHMANN, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Bob Aschmann was born in 1965 in Zürich, Switzerland. After initial studies in English Literature and Linguistics at the University of Zürich, his growing interest in the visual arts led him to work as an assistant to fashion photographer Günther Kathrein and, a year later, to enroll in the film program at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada.

After graduating from SFU in 1993 he started working as a Director of Photography in both the drama and the documentary world. Since then Bob has shot 13 seasons of television and over 10 feature films, including all six seasons of the original Showtime Series The L-word and the recent feature film Red Snow with director Marie Clements. LICHEN is his fifth collaboration with Lisa Jackson, others included her award winning short film Savage, and the most recent multi media installation Transmissions. Bob lives in Vancouver with his partner Alison and his fourteen year old daughter Coco. <http://www.bobdop.com>

JANINE MARCHESSAULT, CURATOR

Dr. Marchessault is Professor of Cinema and Media Studies in the Department of Cinema and Media Arts at York University, where she held the Canada Research Chair in Art, Digital Media and Globalization (2003-2013). She was the co-founder of Future Cinema Lab and the inaugural Director of Sensorium: Centre for Digital Arts and Technology Research at York University. In 2012, Professor Marchessault was awarded a prestigious Trudeau Fellowship to pursue her curatorial and public art research around the problem of sustainable development. She has (co)curated numerous large-scale public art exhibitions in Toronto and beyond—Being on Time (2001), The Leona Drive Project (2009), Museum for the End of the World(2012) and Land|Slide, Possible Futures (2013) which are all site specific exhibitions. Land|Slide was named one of the best exhibitions in Canada in 2013 by Canadian Art Magazine, and was invited to be part of the Shenzhen/Hong-Kong Architectural Biennale (2013-2014).

<https://janinemarchessault.wordpress.com>

END CREDITS

LICHEN

A FILM BY
LISA JACKSON

EDITED BY
TERRA JEAN LONG

FEATURING
TREVOR GOWARD, LICHENOLOGIST

FEATURING LICHENS
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

TREE-HUGGERS' PELT GREYLANDIC MAP PEBBLED PIXIE-CUP DIAMOND PELT LUNGWORT PITTED SPECKLEBELLY BRITISH SOLDIERS STUMP PIXIE BRONZED PIXIE-CUP MARITIME SUNBURST TOY-SOLDIERS	UNIVERSAL ROCKWORM BIG-HORN PIXIE SMOKER'S LUNG DISTRIBUTED GOLDSPECK ROCKFACE FIREDOT ELEGANT SUNBURST GROUND DUST RUSTING TILE NAMELESS PELT LUNGWORT SHEEPISH PELT
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CINEMATOGRAPHY BY
BOB ASCHMANN

COMMISSIONED BY
JANINE MARCHESSAULT

PRODUCERS
JANINE MARCHESSAULT
CHRISTIAN KROITOR

FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	ALICE KIM
PRODUCTION MANAGERS	AIMÉE MITCHELL JESSICA MULVOGUE
ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER	JULIA GALLE
LICHEN HANDLER	AIMÉE MITCHELL

SOUND DESIGN	TERRA LONG
INTERVIEW AUDIO RECORDING	CLANCY DENNEHY
ADDITIONAL COMPOSITION	CLANCY DENNEHY
RE-RECORDING MIXER	CORY MANDEL
MIX ASSISTANT	KENT THOMSON

STEREOGRAPHER	CHRISTIAN KROITOR
FOCUS PULLER	TOM C. HALL
LIGHTING ASSISTANT	ISIAH MEDINA
PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS	AIDAN CHEEATOW TYLER TOYNE

COMPOSITOR	ANDREW JEHAN
COMPOSITING TECHNICIAN	LIAM RYAN
ROSCOPE ARTIST	MARTIN LINDLEY

POST PRODUCTION TECHNICIANS	ISIAH MEDINA DANIEL NEGATU
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RITA TSE

3D CONSULTANT

JAMES STEWART

DIGITAL IMAGING BY TECHNICOLOR TORONTO:

DIGITAL IMAGING COLOURIST

JIM FLEMING

DIGITAL IMAGING SUPERVISOR

ANDREW PASCOE

DIGITAL IMAGING TECHNICIAN

MARGARET HUTZ

SALES EXECUTIVE

MIKE MCCONNELL

DIGITAL IMAGING PRODUCERS

PATRICK DUCHESNE

DARCY ARTHURS

MUSIC

EXCERPTS FROM "FEEL", "SLEEP", "CREEK",
"FEET", "GREEN", THE GREEN ALBUM.

COMPOSED BY HIROSHI YOSHIMURA.

SONA GAIA PRODUCTIONS, NARADA RECORDS, 1986.

KEPLER STAR KIC7661081B LIGHT CURVE WAVES TO SOUND
COURTESY OF NASA

SUN SONIFICATION

A. KOSOVICHEV, STANFORD EXPERIMENTAL PHYSICS LAB
COURTESY OF NASA

OUTER WORLDS

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THE ARTS, MEDIA, PERFORMANCE AND DESIGN, IF, CINESPACE

THANKS

EDGEWOOD BLUE, CURTIS BJÖRK, ERICA GIES, TROY MCMULLIN, SHAUN NAKATSURU,
SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN, PURPLE THE DOG

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TRANSCRIPT

TREVOR GOWARD:

I like to say that lichens colonized the surface of my mind.

The lichen is the outward manifestation of process.

It's verbal.

It's not a thing. It's a relationship.

It exists at a kind of doorway, and when you look out this doorway in one direction what you see is the organism.

But if you look out the doorway in the other direction and you have the ecosystem.

A lichen is a fungus that has discovered agriculture.

The fungus has acquired the ability to acquire algal cells, the algal cells being green, they're photosynthesizing, they're producing sugars from sunlight. They help to feed the fungus.

Together the two of them can do amazing things.

It frees them. It frees both partners from living on the ground.

The lichen covers the widest array of ecological niches. Right down to the Antarctic, higher than anything else in the Himalayas.

They occupy the spaces in the living world where other organisms can't grow.

